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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: BACKLOG AT TURKEY-IRAQ BORDER THREATENS U.S.

SUPPLIES OPERATIONS TO IRAQ

Classified By: CDA Robert S. Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) There has been a recent increase in the backlog of trucks seeking to cross the Turkish border from Iraq. The most recent report from the U.S. Army Movement Control Team stationed on the Iraqi side of the border showed that the backlog had reached over 7,000 trucks. This jump represents almost a week's waiting time and is creating problems for U.S. military, Humanitarian Assistance Agency and commercial shippers in finding trucks to send to Iraq.

2. (C) Over the past 30 days, U.S. military sources report 1534 trucks per day have crossed into Iraq from Turkey; however, only 1,349 have crossed back into Turkey, resulting in the growing backlog in Iraq. The decline in the northbound through-processing rate appears attributable to a combination of factors, including difficult summer work conditions (temperatures above 120 F), summer leave for Customs employees, difficulty in finding Customs employees to assign to work in hardship conditions, and stepped-up security measures following the upturn in PKK-linked violence in eastern Turkey. Furthermore, the rate at which trucks are arriving at the border seeking to re-enter Turkey from Iraq seems to have increased due to a shorter "turn-around time" in Iraq as drop-offs are made closer to the border for security reasons.

3. (C) According to U.S. military sources, another problem has developed. Turkish authorities have recently begun implementing a regulation that limits individual fuel tankers to 75% of full load. Enforcement of this regulation -- which is designed to protect the roadbed from the heavy weight of full tankers -- was re-instituted following the recent expiration of a one-year waiver that had been agreed with U.S. military authorities. (Note: we are still trying to determine the origin and status of this rule.)

4. (C) Econoff raised our concerns with Akif Ayhan, Head of Department in the MFA Directorate for Economic Affairs, on July 22 and shared the U.S. statistics on truck processing through the border. We emphasized that we needed the GOT to take action immediately to increase the northbound processing at the border and suggested that more personnel could be assigned to handle the backlog and more processing stations could be opened to process more trucks simultaneously.

5. (C) Ayhan asked his counterparts in the Foreign Trade Undersecretariat and Customs Undersecretariat to respond to our concerns. On July 23, Ayhan reported back that border officials will begin immediately to discourage "fictitious" truck traffic -- truckers who enter Iraq solely to buy cheap fuel in Iraq (each truck is allowed to return with 800 liters in the tank) and sell it on the Turkish Black Market at a large profit. However, MFA reported that Customs officials disputed our claim that the volume of northbound processing has worsened in recent weeks. They also claimed that it is not possible to increase the number of processing stations at the border complex. Econoff responded that we cannot tell Turkey how to improve the numbers, just that something must be done soon.

6. (C) Charge also discussed the problems with MFA Deputy U/S Kilic, suggesting that steps be taken to reduce the backlog to more normal levels. Such a step would require, again, additional personnel or temporary concentration on northbound traffic for those personnel at the gate. Charge also raised the issue of the regulation limiting fuel truck loads to 75% of capacity. Kilic was unaware of this problem and promised to look into both issues.

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